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United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

Persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities

Report of the Secretary-General

1. The present report is submitted to the General Assembly in pursuance of paragraph 5 of its resolution 51/126 of 13 December 1996, entitled "Persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities", the operative paragraphs of which read as follows:

> "*The General Assembly*,
>
> "...
>
> "1. *Reaffirms* the right of all persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities to return to their homes or former places of residence in the territories occupied by Israel since 1967;
>
> "2. *Expresses the hope* for an accelerated return of displaced persons through the mechanism agreed upon by the parties in article XII of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements;
>
> "3. *Endorses*, in the meanwhile, the efforts of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to continue to provide humanitarian assistance, as far as practicable, on an emergency basis, and as a temporary measure, to persons in the area who are currently displaced and in serious need of continued assistance as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities;
>
> "4. *Strongly appeals* to all Governments and to organizations and individuals to contribute generously to the Agency and to the other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations concerned for the above purposes;
>
> "5. *Requests* the Secretary-General, after consulting with the Commissioner-General, to report to the General Assembly before its fifty-second session on the progress made with regard to the implementation of the present resolution."

2. On 7 May 1997, the Secretary-General addressed a note verbale to the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations, in which he drew attention to his reporting responsibility under the resolution and requested the Permanent Representative to inform him of any action his Government had taken or envisaged taking in implementation of the relevant provisions of the resolution.

3. In a note verbale dated 28 July 1997, the Permanent Representative of Israel replied as follows:

> "Israel's position on these resolutions has been set forth in successive annual replies submitted to the Secretary-General in recent years, the latest of which

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being Israel's note verbal dated 3 May 1993. Israel regrets the fact that the resolutions regarding the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) remain rife with political issues irrelevant to the work for which UNRWA is responsible, and thus remain detached from the new reality in the area. Accordingly, Israel abstained on resolution 51/127 and voted against resolutions 51/124, 51/126, 51/128, 51/129 and 51/130.

"The agreements between Israel and Palestinians mark significant progress in the framework of the peace process. Israel believes that this process is the only way to achieve historic reconciliation and lasting peace between the two sides. However, for this process to succeed, it is imperative that both sides abide by their commitments made under the agreements signed by them. Israel calls upon the Palestinian side to live up to its commitments and resume its participation in the negotiations on all outstanding interim matters and on permanent status issues.

"Israel believes that UNRWA can play an important role in promoting the social and economic advancement foreseen in the agreements between Israel and the Palestinians, within the limits of its humanitarian mandate, and accordingly looks forward to continuing the cooperation and good working relationship with UNRWA.

"In the light of the above, Israel considers it essential that the General Assembly consolidate the resolutions regarding UNRWA into one resolution directly related to the Agency's humanitarian tasks. This would also be compatible with the necessity to rationalize the work of the General Assembly."

4. In connection with paragraph 2 of General Assembly resolution 51/126, the Secretary-General has obtained from the Commissioner-General of UNRWA the information available to him on the return of refugees registered with the Agency. As indicated in previous reports on the subject, the Agency is not involved in any arrangements for the return of refugees nor is it involved in any arrangements for the return of displaced persons who are not registered as refugees. Its information is based on requests by returning registered refugees for transfer of their entitlements for services to the areas to which they have returned and subsequent correction of records. The Agency would not necessarily be aware of the return of any registered refugees who did not request the provision of services. So far as is known to the Agency, between 1 July 1996 and 30 June 1997, 841 refugees registered with UNRWA returned to the West Bank and 352 to the Gaza Strip. It should be noted that some of these may not themselves have been displaced in 1967, but may be members of the family of a displaced registered refugee whom they accompanied on his return or joined thereafter. Thus, taking into account the estimate given in paragraph 4 of the report of the Secretary-General dated 17 September 1996 (A/51/369), the number of displaced registered refugees who are known by the Agency to have returned to the occupied territories since June 1967 is about 16,400. The Agency is unable to estimate the total number of displaced inhabitants who have returned. It keeps records only of registered refugees and, as pointed out above, even those records, particularly with respect to location of registered refugees, may be incomplete.

5. In connection with paragraph 3 of General Assembly resolution 51/126, the Secretary-General refers to the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA for the period 1 July 1996 to 30 June 1997 (A/52/13) and to the previous reports of the Commissioner-General for accounts of the continuous and ongoing assistance provided by UNRWA to persons displaced and in need of continued assistance.